

**WHEATLAND  
ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE**

# NEWS



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## FROM THE MANAGER

# May is Electrical Safety Month



**Bruce W. Mueller**

At Wheatland Electric Cooperative, Inc., (WEC) we recognize Electrical Safety Month every May, but we also know the importance of

practicing safety year-round. From our co-op crews to you, the members we serve, we recognize that everyone has a part to play in prioritizing safety.

According to Electrical Safety Foundation International, thousands of people in the U.S. are critically injured or electrocuted as a result of electrical fires and accidents in their own homes. Many of these accidents are preventable. Electricity is a necessity, and it powers our daily lives. But we know first-hand how dangerous electricity can be because we work with it 365 days a year.

To me, safety is more than a catchphrase. As CEO/general manager,

it's my responsibility to keep co-op employees safe. Additionally, we want to help keep you and all members of our community safe.

That's why you'll see our WEC safety team and WEC lineworkers hosting safety demonstrations in schools, community events, and with first responders across our service territory.

At these safety demos, we demonstrate firsthand exactly what can happen to the human body or objects that come in contact with energized power lines. We also discuss emergency scenarios, such as what to do in a car accident involving a utility pole and downed power lines.

In fact, in 2021 alone, we reached over 1,500 participants with our live, safety demonstrations — from the very young to older generations, too. We caution students on the dangers of playing around pad-mounted transformers and warn the public about overloading circuits with too many electronic devices.

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## SAFETY TIP OF THE MONTH

Try to practice situational awareness every day. This is the ability to identify, process and understand what is happening around you, while thinking ahead to prevent or mitigate potential safety incidents. It requires you to stay alert and draw upon your unique set of experiences and skills to evaluate your environment.



# THANK YOU!

## Lineworker Appreciation Goes a Long Way at Wheatland

Day or night, rain or shine, we appreciate our lineworkers every day for all they do to power our lives. However, on Lineworker Appreciation Day, held April 11 this year, our lineworkers received a little bit of extra love!

To show these hard-working employees how much we care, every lineworker at Wheatland Electric received a special gift: a branded pocketknife from the cooperative.

We also collected thank you letters from second grade students across our service territory. Check out some of our favorite letters here or visit our YouTube Channel (search "Wheatland Electric" at [www.YouTube.com](http://www.YouTube.com) or go to <https://youtu.be/90xHNjIomVw>) to see a short video of these students readings their messages to heroes in hardhats!

You can also join the convo online by using #ThankALineworker on Facebook, Instagram or Twitter!



**WHEATLAND ELECTRIC** Write a letter or draw a picture for a lineworker to say 'Thank you!'  
Return to Wheatland Electric by April 1

DEAR LINEWORKER,  
 Thank you for  
 Sacrificing your self  
 for us. Thank you for  
 Saving our electricity.  
 Thank you for climbing  
 high.

FROM: Ethan AGE: 8  
 SCHOOL: Wiley Elementary TEACHER: Miss Hattabaugh 2022

**WHEATLAND ELECTRIC** Write a letter or draw a picture for a lineworker to say 'Thank you!'  
Return to Wheatland Electric by April 1

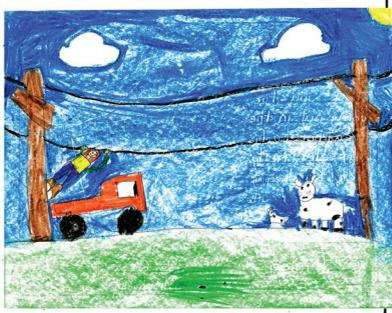
DEAR LINEWORKER,  
 Thank you for keeping  
 our power going. We  
 see your good work  
 and it is really good.  
 Thank you for keeping  
 our Electricity on.  
 We appreciate.

FROM: Chesney AGE: 5  
 SCHOOL: Kyle Fine Blvd TEACHER: Ms. Hoepker 2022

**WHEATLAND ELECTRIC** Write a letter or draw a picture for a lineworker to say "Thank you!"  
Return to Wheatland Electric by April 1

DEAR LINEWORKER,

Thank you for going out in the weather to fix our electricity and for keeping the lights on.

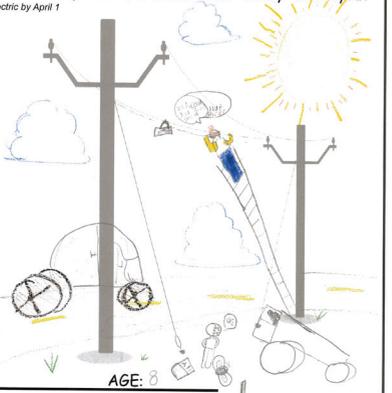


FROM: Tinley AGE: 8  
SCHOOL: SCES TEACHER: Mrs. Koehn 2022

**WHEATLAND ELECTRIC** Write a letter or draw a picture for a lineworker to say "Thank you!"  
Return to Wheatland Electric by April 1

DEAR LINEWORKER,

thank you for giving the world power. Thank you for letting me play games and have electric things like a fridge and TV, toaster, iPad, phone and more. You have been very helpful. Thank you!

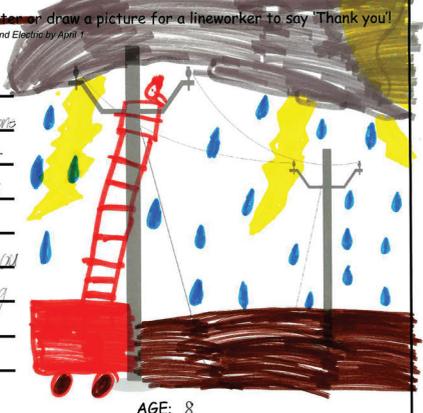


FROM: Monroe AGE: 8  
SCHOOL: Spaulding elementary TEACHER: Mrs. Stremetz 2022

**WHEATLAND ELECTRIC** Write a letter or draw a picture for a lineworker to say "Thank you!"  
Return to Wheatland Electric by April 1

DEAR LINEWORKER,

you make everyone happy. I know it is hard. But you make electric work. Thank you for every thing you do. Great job! Karae



FROM: Karae AGE: 8  
SCHOOL: Park TEACHER: Hoffmann 2022



## MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

# A Story as Sweet as Honey

When **JIM ROWAN** purchased his very first box of bees, he was only 10 years old.

Beekeeping wasn't a part of his family's upbringing, nor did any teacher or other mentor in his life instill in him a love for the unusual hobby.

Instead, while working on a school assignment, the now-retired insurance agent and banker from Sumner County stumbled onto an encyclopedia entry while searching for a topic to write about.

The backstory of the busy and industrious honeybee fascinated the young boy, and he went in search to learn more about these curious creatures.

Less than an hour's drive away in Wichita, Jim found a local beekeeper with honeybees and supplies for sale to start his first colony.

At that time, he purchased two brood chambers (a single-level box that contains the queen and all the eggs she will lay), two honey supers (a box placed on top of the hive that is used to collect honey), and a package of busy bees, for only \$10 a piece.

"Those same two hives today would have been \$400," Jim explained.

Jim's wife and small business partner, Sharon, interjected.

"This was 66 years ago," she said.

Her response must have stung.

"She loves telling my age," Jim replied with a laugh.

## A Buzzworthy Backstory

Jim and Sharon have operated their

unique storefront, Rowan's Honey Shop, in Norwich for nearly two decades. However, their love and devotion for the honeybee spans many years before that.

"I tell everyone she married me for my bees," Jim said, lovingly.

It's true, Sharon admits. After the couple married in 1967, Sharon, who grew up in Hutchinson and met Jim through her college roommate from Norwich, came on board to the beekeeping business.

Jim taught his "city girl" everything she now knows about the honeybee: how to start new colonies each spring, how to care for the creatures, how to build new hives from existing colonies, how to extract their sweet fluid, and more. As they started a family and raised three children together, she took it upon herself to come up with clever and delicious ways to utilize Mother Nature's sweet syrup in the kitchen, too.

Inside their quaint mom-and-pop shop at 218 N. Main is a homegrown set of products that share a single trait: everything sold inside either contains honey or boasts ingredients belonging to the honey-making process: beeswax in the shoe polish, dried pollen sold in jars and used for allergy relief, and natural honeycombs for spreading on breakfast toast and chewing like gum once all the honey's gone.

Alongside these goods are the everyday edibles their neighbors across central Kansas and other out-of-town fans come back for: honey apple salsa, honey barbecue sauce, honey

horseradish mustard, spun (or creamed) honey infused with a variety of flavors, and — of course — jars and bear-shaped bottles of the sweet, sticky substance that has been so carefully and lovingly extracted from their bees.

Always meant as a hobby, the retired couple (him from finance and her from teaching) now spend most days minding around 200 beehives, working in the kitchen in the back of their shop to craft their concoctions, and teaching people from all walks of life how to start their very own bee operation.

While they're only advertised as open on Fridays and Saturday mornings, they don't want to miss any budding bee enthusiasts. That's why the couple tries to make themselves available almost every day of the week.

"We have so many out-of-towners. If someone drives all that way, I want them to be able to contact us," Sharon said, adding that their phone number is on the front door.

"We're here almost every day working, maybe not all day, but part of the day. And anytime we're here, we're open," she added.

## What All the Buzz is About

An apiary, a place where bees are kept for their honey, generally consists of several hives.

The Rowans' 200 or so hives are spread out across at least four Kansas counties: Sumner, Kingman, Harper and Sedgwick. A good hive will often house between 80,000 to 100,000 honeybees, putting the number of creatures under



their care in the tens of millions in the spring and summer.

Oftentimes, the couple will even transport their well-populated hives to areas where farmers or large-scale gardeners want to capitalize on the precious pollination process.

Apple orchards, for example, are 100% dependent on bees to produce high yields, according to Jim. So it's worth the orchardist's time and money to bring the bees close to his or her apple blossoms, even if for a short period of time.

It's a labor-intensive job, one the Rowans charge for when heavy boxes of hives must be loaded and unloaded repeatedly. However, it's necessary because there aren't enough honeybees in the wild.

Many decades of using pesticides, loss of habitat, climate change and disease have all contributed to the rapid decline of these natural pollinators — not only honeybees but also butterflies, beetles, bats and birds. That's bad news for the planet and its biodiversity, but worse news for our food supply, according to the Rowans.

"Most people don't realize that one out of every three bites of food you take is thanks to a honeybee," Sharon said. "But now, there's been a lot more publicity about bees being in danger, so people are becoming a lot more aware of it."

A national movement about the dangers our pollinator pals face is growing. That's why pollinator gardens that are lush with nectar- and pollen-rich flowers and plants are becoming more commonplace in community parks, gardens and backyards. Growing

interest in beekeeping classes, which are taught by the Rowans at both their shop in Norwich and at Wichita State University, is also at an all-time high.

In fact, their students come from all socioeconomic backgrounds — doctors, lawyers, teachers and more. Their continuing education classes are taught in the early spring, when the business of beekeeping begins, and all the supplies needed to start and maintain a hive can be found right inside Rowan's Honey Shop.

"And we have every age — from young kids to retired folks like us," Sharon added.

### Sticky Business

When Jim brought home his first set of beekeeping supplies as a young boy, he observed his bees every single day with only a makeshift veil, he said.

When the honey came that first year, he cut it out of the combs, collected it in a large bowl, and went to work with a potato masher. A novice beekeeper, Jim used cheesecloth to strain the golden liquid. It was a learning experience for the young boy, who eventually ended up with honey all over his mother's kitchen.

"She said you can't do that ever again," Jim said. "Everything you touch in here is sticky!"

The next year, as Jim's knowledge in his newfound activity grew, he collected discarded bottles around his neighborhood for 3 cents a piece. He purchased a package of bees that came in the mail — \$25 from the Sears Roebuck catalog — and with another \$5, a used honey extractor, a device to collect honey using centrifugal force.

It's the same tool that beekeepers use today, albeit smaller and less modern, to extract the honey without destroying the honeycomb. Of course, even with today's modern tools and supplies, the business of beekeeping can still be "pretty sticky."

"We tell beginning beekeepers, you've got to remember, a drop of honey will cover an entire kitchen," Sharon added and laughed.

### Busy, Busy Bees

Today, the Rowans order their young bees close to the start of each year. They come on a semi-truck from California and are sold in packages. Each 3 pound package costs somewhere between \$150 and \$170 and contains enough bees to start a colony that will survive, multiply and flourish.

Every bee — male or female — has a very specific role, according to the experts. Working together, the colony builds and maintains hives, reproduces and raises young, regulates the inside temperature, and collects and stores food in the form of honey.

Only one queen per hive can exist, and she lays over 2,000 eggs a day, actively selecting which will be male and which female.

"A drone is a male bee — he has no stinger. He has one purpose and one purpose only — to mate with the queen in midair. This rips him wrong side out, and he falls to earth — dead," Jim explained.

Unlike the short and tragic life of the male drone, the females — primarily worker bees — run themselves to death, often in as little as two to three weeks in the summer.

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**RIGHT:** Sharon and Jim Rowan, who have raised honeybees for most of their lives, pose with a frame of honeycomb inside Rowan's Honey Shop in Norwich, Kansas. **FAR RIGHT:** Though the store is only advertised as open on Fridays and Saturdays, the shop is always open when Sharon and Jim are working inside on weekdays. Their Norwich storefront was once the local post office but now boasts their honey products, edibles and beekeeping supplies.



# A Story as *Sweet* as Honey

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The bees come and go from the hives as they please to fulfill Mother Nature's primary function. That is, pollination is needed for plants to reproduce and the bees also benefit, using nectar and pollen for their own food source.

After being carried back to the hive, the pollen and nectar is broken down into simple sugars and stored inside the honeycombs. Only the bees know when their honey is ready, capping each individual comb with beeswax that is secreted from their abdomens.

This also tells humans that the honey is "cured" or ready to be consumed, normally during the hotter months of July and August, according to the Rowans. Honey extracted prior to being capped is "green" and would make us very sick if consumed.

"Man can't make honey because they don't know when to put that wax cap on. We melt that beeswax down, and it's worth even more than the honey," Jim explained, adding that it takes 10 pounds of honey to make a pound of wax.

In fact, pure beeswax has many uses including strengthening sewing thread, lubricating wood furniture and tools, and is mixed with additional ingredients to make some of the other items sold in their store: shoe polish, lip balm, soap and other products.

Alongside these items is the pure golden syrup that wouldn't be possible without the heavy lifting performed by honeybees, primarily by the working females inside each colony.

"Remember, a male can't feed himself, he can't sting you, and he can't gather nectar," Sharon said. "I always tell the schoolkids that the (male) drones are the cheerleaders. They sit in their chair all summer and say 'Girls, you're doing a great job — keep up the good work!'"

## Meant to Bee

Until about a decade ago, the shop where the Rowans now sell their honey used to be the post office in Norwich,

a community of about 500.

Prior to that, starting in 1980, the couple sold honey out of the back door of their home. Despite demand for their product, they took a long break from the business starting in 1982 to raise their three children and focus on their full-time jobs, only fully returning to the honey hustle again in the early 2000s.

Today, their knowledge and expertise are well known in their quad-county area.

For example, when folks see bee swarms in their local area, their first call is to the Rowans. Swarming is a colony's natural means of reproduction — when a single colony splits into two or more — and can most often be seen in large clusters on tree branches.

A photograph of one of the largest swarms the couple has ever been called to — on Main Street in Harper — hangs on the back wall of their shop.

"That was an exceptionally big one. We caught it, put it in a hive, and took it home," Jim said, explaining that all he had to do to get the bees to cooperate was shake the tree branch, which allowed him to dump the bees into a bucket before pouring them into an empty hive.

"(Sharon) says when I catch swarms, I make it look too easy," Jim added, joking.

Believe it or not, when bees are swarming, they are often more docile than normal because their primary motive is finding a new home as opposed to protecting their young or defending their honey stores, according to the bee experts.



Jim and Sharon Rowan maintain beehives, like those pictured, in Sumner, Kingman, Harper and Sedgwick counties. They are often near large gardens and fruit-producing farms that will benefit from the honeybees' pollinating process.

On the very same wall inside their honey shop hangs another photograph, this one a portrait of their daughter, Jackie, wearing her 2003 Kansas Honey Queen crown.

The youngest of their three adult children, the Kansas State University graduate and student of bakery science has often helped her parents develop new ideas and products for the family business.

In fact, the Rowans have even discussed handing over the keys to their three children, two sons who live out of state and their daughter who lives closer to home.

Between their children and many grandchildren, the Rowans are hopeful that they'll be able to pass on their love for honeybees and the creatures' golden gift to their community for generations to come.

"(Jackie) was only three years old when she was running the mixer at home. As a kid, you think she'd pull it up and splatter, but she never did," Jim said, referring to his grown daughter. "Her daughter, our granddaughter Elizabeth — she's only three — and she's the same way. She loves to help grandma cook — and grandma loves it, too."

# May is Electrical Safety Month Continued from page 12A

There's no doubt that electricity is an integral part of modern life. Given the prevalence of electrical devices, tools and appliances, I'd like to pass along a few practical electrical safety tips. Take a look around at home and at work and make sure these hazards do not pose a threat to your family, friends or coworkers.

- ▶ **FRAYED WIRES POSE A SERIOUS SAFETY HAZARD.** Power cords can become damaged or frayed from age, heavy use or excessive current flow through the wiring. If cords become frayed or cut, replace them, as they could cause a shock when handled.
- ▶ **AVOID OVERLOADING CIRCUITS.** Circuits can only cope with a limited amount of electricity. Overload happens when you draw more electricity than a circuit can safely handle — by having too many devices running on one circuit.
- ▶ **LABEL CIRCUIT BREAKERS** to understand the circuits in your home. Contact a qualified electrician if your home is more than 40 years old and you need to install multiple large appliances that consume large amounts of electricity. We can even put you in touch with a trusted, local electrician if you call your local Wheatland office.

▶ **USE EXTENSION CORDS PROPERLY.** Never plug an extension cord into another extension cord. If you “daisy chain” them together, it could lead to overheating, creating a potential fire hazard. Do not exceed the wattage of the cord. Doing so also creates a risk of overloading the cord and creates a fire hazard. Extension cords should not be used as permanent solutions. If you need additional outlets, contact a licensed electrician to help.

I encourage you to talk with your kids about playing it safe and smart around electricity. Help them be aware of overhead power lines near where they play outdoors. And remind them to never, ever approach downed power lines.

Our vision is to provide essential services that are safe, reliable and competitively priced to enhance the lives of our members. It's a responsibility we take seriously, but equally important is keeping our community safe around electricity.

Follow us on social media for additional electrical safety tips all month long. And if you would like us to provide a safety demonstration at your school or community event, contact your local Wheatland office so we can make those arrangements.

**UNTIL NEXT TIME, TAKE CARE.**

## Wheatland Electric Presents at Spring KMSDA

Wheatland Electric's social media specialist, **SHAJIA DONECKER**, presented to a group of Kansas electric cooperative professionals at the Kansas Member Services Directors Association (KMSDA) meeting on March 31.

Donecker, who started at Wheatland Electric in August 2020, is responsible for managing the cooperative's social media channels and all related multimedia content for cooperative events and programs.

Her No. 1 tip for creating and sharing content online is to make sure it's compelling and meaningful for the cooperative's online audience.

“Compelling content can mean different things for different co-ops and can depend on where you're located,” Donecker said during the meeting. “Compelling content might be a portrait of a lineman who's served

a significant number of years, and for another it might be significantly damaged poles. It's things that people will be interested to see or have a reason to interact with.”

Donecker added that in today's digital age, social media consumers typically have only split seconds to engage with your content, so “getting to the point” and keeping messaging simple and easy to understand is key to driving digital engagement.

In addition to participating in several professional development breakout sessions, staff from Wheatland Electric's member services department also participated in a day-long pre-conference workshop covering crisis response management.

KMSDA, facilitated by the Kansas Electric Cooperatives, Inc. and comprised of representatives from



Shajia Donecker, social media specialist, presents to a group of cooperative professionals during the KMSDA spring meeting on March 31 at the Courtyard by Marriott at Old Town in Wichita.

both generation and distribution cooperatives across the state, meets biannually each spring and fall.

## Outages and Restoring Power Safely

We do our best to avoid them, but there's no way around it: power outages occasionally happen. For most Wheatland Electric members, outages are rare and only last a few hours. But when severe weather impacts our area, extended outages are unavoidable.

So when the power goes out, how do our crews know where to start working? How do you know if your outage has been reported? We've got answers to these questions and more, and it all starts with a safe, efficient plan for power restoration.

When the lights go out and it's safe for our crews to begin the restoration process, they start by patrolling the power lines by assessing the cause and damage. Then they safely repair the power lines and equipment that will restore power to the greatest number of people in the shortest time possible. Our lineworkers have access to an Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) system) and an updated mapping system to restore power quickly and safely.

This process typically begins with repairs to the larger main distribution lines that service the greatest number of homes and businesses. After those repairs are made, crews work on tap lines, which deliver power to transformers, either mounted on utility poles (for above-ground service) or placed on pads (for underground service). Finally, individual service lines that run between the transformer and the home are repaired.

We can't control the weather, but



During severe weather, line crews act as safely and quickly as possible to begin restoration. Never approach downed power lines and contact Wheatland Electric or first responders immediately if you see them.

we can prepare for it. Wheatland keeps a supply of extra utility poles, transformers, and other equipment on hand in all the communities we serve so we can quickly get to work in the event of an outage. When widespread outages occur, multiple crews will be out in the field simultaneously working to repair damage at multiple locations.

We also coordinate with nearby co-ops to bring in additional crews when necessary. Cooperation Among Cooperatives is one of our seven guiding cooperatives principles. In late March, when severe winter weather caused more than 7,500 consumers with Midwest Energy Inc., in central Kansas to lose power, our Great Bend office sent a line crew of four to assist with broken poles and repairs from March 22-28. These lineworkers repaired and replaced poles, changed out cross arms, spliced wire, and did additional repairs during very long days in and around Rozel (Pawnee County).

We also sent a five man line crew to assist Western Electric Cooperative, Inc. from Garden City. Crews completed additional repairs north of the town of Ellis from March 22-27.

Thank you to these cooperative employees for their hard work and dedication to our neighboring cooperatives! Mother Nature can be unpredictable, but as a member of Wheatland, you can feel confident knowing we're standing by, ready to restore power as quickly and safely as possible.



Brandon Ritchie, journeyman lineman from Great Bend, works to restore power in and around Pawnee County. Wheatland sent a line crew to assist Midwest Energy Inc. during widespread outages in late March.

## How to Report an Outage



If you experience a power outage, don't assume a neighbor reported it. It's best to report the outage yourself. Call your local Wheatland office during regular business hours or our outage reporting hotline after hours, on holidays, and weekends: 800-ONAGAIN (662-4246).

To stay up to date, you can also visit our outage map at [weci.net/view-or-report-outage](http://weci.net/view-or-report-outage). We also post updates in real time to our Facebook page ([facebook.com/WheatlandElectric](https://www.facebook.com/WheatlandElectric)) with new information as it becomes available. However, outage reports and messages on Facebook are not monitored. Please use our hotline to report an outage instead. Follow us on Facebook or our website to stay up to date!



James Swanson, journeyman lineman from Great Bend, assists with repairs after major outages. Cooperation among Cooperatives is one of our Seven Guiding Principles, which means cooperatives share resources in times of need.